
Acreage Living

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Landscaping for Wildlife

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Attracting wildlife to the backyard is easy by providing what they need. All wild animals need habitat to survive. Habitat is made up of four factors: 1) space, 2) food, 3) shelter, and 4) water. Each factor is essential for a good habitat and varies somewhat by the species of wildlife and the season. To ensure the greatest variety of wildlife species, provide a yard with the largest variety of food, shelter, and cover by providing different types of plants, feeders, and houses.

Natural sources of food can be things such as nectar-bearing flowers, seeds, fruits, berries, and insects. Planting various herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees provides a variety of species and a variety of structure. This ensures a wide variety of insects and other food sources. To wildlife, as with people, there are two kinds of food sources: preferred and persistent. Preferred food sources are the ones animals like the best and eat very quickly. These include shrubs like chokecherry, raspberry, and serviceberry for birds. Shrubs like hazelnut, wild plum, and willow are preferred by small mammals.

On the other hand, persistent foods are not as well-liked and not eaten right away. Included in this

group are trees like elm and honey locust, and shrubs like dogwoods, highbush cranberries, and other viburnums. These shrubs have berries that persist on the plants well into the fall or early winter. Pick a combination of preferred and persistent food sources so food will be available over a longer period of time.

For pulling wildlife in close for observation, you may want to provide supplemental feeding, especially in the winter months. Many homeowners find that feeding seeds in summer, while nice, also increases their chipmunk, ground squirrel, and tree squirrel populations and problems. Various types of feeders at different levels and locations, stocked with different types of foods (sugar water and insect larvae in the summer, for example) attract the widest variety of species. Check *Bird feeding: tips for beginners and veterans*, (G3176) available at your county ISU Extension office, for more details.



All animals need shelter for cover, roosting, and raising young. Some species need more specialized

cover than others. Plant trees and bushes for nesting birds, and add evergreen trees for protection against winter storms and winds. Standing dead and downed logs are important for over 50 species of Iowa wildlife. If they are not available on your property, you can provide constructed housing for many species. Check the designs available in *Shelves, houses, and feeders for birds and mammals*, (NCR 338) available at your county extension office.



A source of water is essential for birds year round. Other animals are often attracted to it as well. Options range from a simple plastic bird bath to a rubber-lined backyard pond, complete with a recirculating pump to provide moving water. During the winter, a bird bath with a heater will keep the water from freezing and attract birds that will not normally visit your feeders.

Plan the landscape plantings on paper first. Start with a map of the yard drawn to scale. Mark all plants currently in the yard as well as the buildings, fences, and other structures. Then draw in the wildlife plantings, gardens, and water sources. Plan plants so they vary in height in a “stair-step” pattern. Plan for a variety of plant species, and try to stick with plants that are native in the area to avoid problems with survival and invasiveness.

For more information on what to plant and how to landscape your yard for wildlife see *Managing Iowa Habitats: Attracting birds to your yard*, (Pm-1351d) at your county extension office, or on the web at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/> and follow the links to Publications: General Interest: Wildlife.



Protect Your Investment... Properly Store Your Snowblower and Maintain Your Lawn- mower

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Prepare your snowblower for storage:

A common mistake is storing the snowblower with gasoline left in the tank and carburetor. The snowblower engine should be run until it stalls, when all fuel has been emptied from the tank and carburetor. Following this procedure allows the pinhole sized pathways in the carburetor to drain. If the pathways don't drain, they will become clogged with stale fuel making the engine run poorly, if at all.

Prepare your lawnmower for summer:

If you did not change the engine oil in your lawnmower last fall you should do so this spring. I recommend running the engine for about 10 minutes to warm up the old oil. Drain the old oil warm because more of it leaves the engine than if it were drained cold. Refill the engine to the correct level with fresh oil. Paper air filters should be replaced and foam or sponge air filters should be cleaned and soaked with fresh engine oil. The spark plugs should be cleaned or replaced. Wash your lawnmower to remove last season's dirt and grease. Maintain or repair all safety devices too. Finally, keep the blade sharp! Sharp blades keep lawns healthy. If your lawn is on a sandy soil, you'll need to sharpen your blade several times this summer. Make sure you don't sharpen a blade that's worn thin on the edges because pieces could break off producing lethal shrapnel.

For assistance, refer to your operator's manual, or contact a qualified small engine repair and maintenance shop.



A Home for All Ages

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Where would you like to live when you are 85 or 90? Most people say they want to stay in their own home or a familiar location. What's more, there's evidence that people may remain healthier when familiar people and routines surround them.

Will your home accommodate your needs as you grow older? Is your home accessible if someone in your family needs to use a wheelchair, crutches, or walker? Every family wants a home that is convenient, comfortable, and attractive. However, studies show that most of us have not thought about changing our homes to make them more livable should we experience physical limits.

The good news is that there ARE ways to make our existing homes safer and more livable for all. If you are building or remodeling, you have an ideal opportunity to add "universal design" features that make a home functional for people with physical limitations. These add little or nothing to current building expenses, but are costly to change later. These five basic features make life more convenient and comfortable for everyone.

1. One no-step entrance. Careful grading and landscaping make an attractive entrance. This eliminates the possible need for building a ramp later. The Welcoming Home display in the Iowa State University Extension tent at the recent Farm Progress Show included this design.

2. Spaces for eating, bathing, and sleeping on an accessible level. Not every part of the house needs to be accessible. A two-story house or a home with a basement is usable, if these key living areas are accessible.

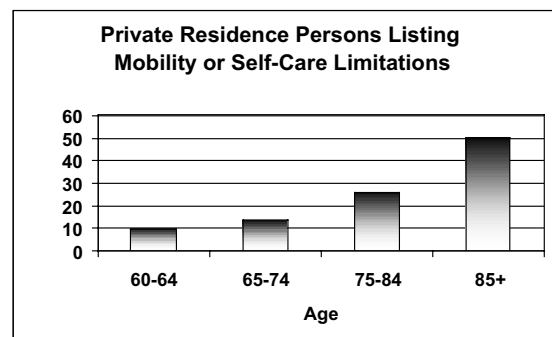
3. Wide doorways (36-inch preferred, 32-inch minimum) on the accessible level.

4. Wide halls and pathways (42 inches preferred, 36 inches minimum) through rooms on the accessible level.

5. Extra floor space for possible wheelchair use is needed in accessible living areas. This requires a 60-inch turning circle in all rooms, including a bathroom.

Homes with universal design features are attractive and spacious. Moving furniture is easier without steps and with wider doors and halls. Family members are more likely to "age-in-place," enjoying their own home and familiar surroundings. In addition to older adults, these features make visiting or living in a home more convenient for others. A parent moving a playpen or a teenager on crutches will find these features more livable, too.

For more information on adapting homes for special needs, visit Iowa State University Extension's website: www.extension.iastate.edu. Click on "Families," then "Strengthening Family Relationships," then on "Elderly Housing Options and Preferences." Or contact your county ISU Extension office and request a copy of "A Home for All Ages." This fact sheet has dozens of ideas for making our homes convenient, comfortable, and attractive for all.



Data from 1990 Census of Population and Housing, compiled by the National Aging Information Center



Warm Season Grasses

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Big Blue-
stem

Are warm season grasses in your future? Do you want them in your future? Why or why not? I've generally written these articles with the goal of matching forages for pasture and hay production to your needs and goals. My personal opinion is that warm season grasses are more suited for pastures than they are for hay production. And their main advantage

is that they grow well in midsummer when cool season grasses are growing little or none.

These grasses make their greatest growth from late June to early September, while cool season grasses do well before and after that period. The general recommendation is that about one fourth of the pasture acres should be planted to warm season grasses to fill in during the hot months. Summer warm season grazing also gives the cool season grasses a much needed rest. So which grasses are we talking about for pasture? Usually switchgrass, Indiangrass and big bluestem. They are winter hardy and will grow in all areas of the state of Iowa. Switchgrass is the most popular because it is usually cheaper and easier to establish but it is considered to be less palatable than the other two species.

Are these "old" species the natural alternative, end all, be all, for folks that are looking for that perfect forage? I doubt it. For high production, these grasses need to be cared for and managed just like any other crop. I have noticed that, in general, they are harder (read more expensive) to establish and are easier to kill through poor management. They can't take close grazing year after year. In fact, switchgrass should not be grazed below about six inches in height. Some of us don't let our cool season pastures get above that height. And these grasses are all bunch grasses and sometimes, on steep side hills, we can get erosion between the bunches. Other folks

think the bunchiness is an advantage in that it provides a running area for wildlife.

If your goal is to re-establish a native prairie, these grasses are probably not what you need or want. You'd probably be happier with some other grasses as well as more of the forbs.



Indian -
grass

For detailed information concerning seeding and management of these three warm season grasses, please contact your county extension office and ask for Pm-569, "Warm-Season Grasses for Hay and Pasture". For Internet surfers, try these sites: "Native Prairie Establishment Job Sheet" from the Natural Resources Conservation Service at <http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/fotg/prairie.html>

"Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, and Switchgrass" from the University of Missouri at <http://www.muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/agguides/crops/g04673.htm> and "Native Prairie Management Guide" by Ray Hamilton, from the Iowa Prairie Network at <http://www.iowaprairienetwork.org/ipnguide.html>



Switch-
grass

Acreage Living is published monthly. For more information, contact your local county ISU Extension office.

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